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ABSTRACT

This book is part of a series that helps parents choose books for their children and talk with them about books in ways that actively engage children with the meaning on the printed page. The introduction notes that it is important for parents to continue sharing books with their children at this age (12 to 14 years). The first chapter, "Reading and Sharing with Children, Ages 12-14," discusses read-aloud strategies and conversation starters. It also offers suggestions for active listening, and offers guidelines for friendly book-sharing conversations. The next chapter, "Choosing Books for Children, Ages 12-14," suggests and describes 13 books that match the developmental characteristics of readers at this age. It organizes them according to mythical journeys, adolescent curiosity, moral dilemmas, and relationships. The next chapter, "Writing: Another Way of Sharing," describes enjoyable activities that can make the reading partnership more pleasurable, using writing to share ideas. It describes keeping a journal, keeping a dialogue journal, outlines other writing activities, and describes briefly 13 books that can serve as great writing models for children. The final chapter describes 14 books on sensitive issues. A Conclusion reviews the most important points. (SR)

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Choosing Books for Children, Ages 12 to 14

Carl B. Smith

from

The Family Learning Association

ERIC
Clearinghouse on English, Reading, and Communication

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Introduction

As a concerned parent, you probably began reading to your children when they were very small. Through their early school years, you also found how valuable it is to continue reading and talking about books with them. Although children in the middle grades are able to work more and more independently, you will still find great benefits in sharing books and conversations with them.

In fact, opportunities for sharing books and discussing them (and occasionally disagreeing) should increase rather than decrease as your child reaches the middle grades. Children are going to have many questions about growing up, and books can provide an effective way to deal openly with issues in an objective way. You can talk about your child's feelings in terms of the feelings and experiences of characters in stories without bringing up questions that may seem too personal.

In this book you will learn how to continue reading and sharing books with your children as they grow

into the early teenage years. You will find information on suggested books that deal with problems important in the early teens, and you will also see how writing can provide an effective way for children to think through their problems and reactions to stories. At the end of the book, you will also find a list of books that deal with sensitive issues.

This is a great time for you to help your children develop the habit of life-long reading for pleasure. Take advantage of this opportunity to increase their reading skills as well as their ability to understand and talk about ideas that are encountered in books.

—Carl B. Smith

Reading and Sharing with Children, Ages 12 to 14

Children at this stage usually have stamina for silent, independent reading and are able to take on longer books and novels. They read books with the same motivation that we read newspapers: to gain information about the adult world—a world they are beginning to feel themselves part of. They read for vicarious experience and for the opportunity to try on new roles and to see themselves in new and different situations. These kids are capable of digging out the deeper meanings of stories and usually enjoy talking about the underlying significance of themes and symbols.

Reading Strategies

You may find that reading aloud with maturing readers will make your sharing time seem more natural. When you read a story together, it just makes sense to talk about it as you move along. But if you and your child can't get comfortable reading to one another, try another approach. Consider these reading and sharing strategies:

This age group is the easiest stage at which to alternate roles as reader and listener and trade off reading chapters or pages of the book aloud to one another. Make sure to encourage your child to interrupt often so that she can ask questions about, or comment on, how the story is developing. Do the same when she reads to you.

You may want to get duplicate copies of the books you and your child share so that each of you can read independently. One father says this strategy worked best for him and his son Nicholas:

> *When Nicholas would bring a book home from school, I'd go to the library to get another copy. We've tried a lot of the suggestions given at family book-sharing meetings. We tried reading separately and that was fine. We tried Nicholas reading a chapter and then me; rotating it back and forth. This worked excellently for us...We've read some books that I had a hard time getting interested in, but because one of us was interested in it, both of us were.*

During this time when young adolescents are struggling to form a sense of personal identity, discussing young adult literature with grown-ups of both genders can provide them with important guidance and insight. Fathers should make an extra effort to read and discuss books with children at this age.

TIP

Make a habit of marking your favorite passages (Post-It Notes™ work perfectly for this). Then you can read them aloud to one another when you come together for your book-sharing conversations.

Conversation Starters

Book-sharing conversations can provide middle-schoolers with the kind of guidance they need to balance their interest in exciting or even dangerous situations with their own lack of life experience. Such conversations are a great opportunity to discuss things like sexual intimacy in a neutral and non-threatening way. Ask questions like, "What do you think made Didi fall in love with Motown?" If you feel comfortable about doing so, you may want to pose more personal questions like "When you fall in love with someone, what do you think it will feel like? How can you let that person know how much you care?"

As you read books like *The Outsiders* or *The Chocolate War* that deal with peer pressure and peer acceptance, you have valuable opportunities to invite your child to talk about his attitude toward cliques, gangs, and groups and to think about what kind of a group he feels comfortable being part of. Questions like "Who in your group or class do you think you are most like?" or "Who do you think has a very different outlook from yours?" will encourage children to see themselves as

unique individuals who are part of a larger group. You might ask questions like "Can you think of a time when everybody else's opinion pushed you into doing something you didn't really think was a very good idea?" Or you might say something like, "You know how Jerry was rebelling in the book *The Chocolate War* and defying Brother Leon's authority? It seems to me that rebellion is just a part of growing up, of trying to figure out who you really are. In what ways do you think you are like that? Who or what do you usually feel like rebelling against?"

As adolescents look for a sense of personal identity, they naturally feel that they need to be independent of the restrictions that parents impose on them. One of the hardest pills parents have to swallow is the apparent loss of importance their own values and opinions have in the eyes of their young adolescent children. Book-sharing conversations may be one more occasion for your child to express her growing sense of independence by voicing opinions that may not agree with your own. In fact, as one mother and her daughter have discovered, "agreeing to disagree" can make your conversations much more worthwhile for both of you:

> *We talked about "having our own opinions" before we started family book sharing at home. We talked about how we wanted this to work and how both of us were entitled to express our own opinions. We agreed that agreeing to disagree, or even agree, was okay—I didn't want this sharing to turn into something that would be negative. We talked about how having our own opinion doesn't mean one of us is right and the other one is wrong. It only means that we have an opinion and neither of us expects the other person to change that opinion. We enjoyed this sharing, but*

I think the big carry-over was the exposure to each other that we had. We both had this experience of accepting someone else's view—that someone being a person you care very deeply about.

TIP

Book-sharing conversations give teens a chance to "try their wings." They can talk about the experiences of people in stories before they encounter them in life.

Active Listening Can Start a Chain Reaction

Parents who use active listening techniques frequently discover that book-sharing questions will start a chain reaction which leads their children to discuss other, sometimes more meaningful, issues.

You can use situations in the books to approach touchy subjects. One mother points this out when she says:

While [my daughter] Becky and I have been book sharing, we have tried to accomplish being more honest with each other. I think honesty is so important during this time for Becky . . . and I say things to her that probably surprise her. I feel more comfortable saying these things during our book conversations, whereas before I was at a loss as to how to bring up these topics. Now we talk more about our feelings and we ask each other a lot more about what the other is thinking and feeling.

For her part, Becky says that she feels more secure knowing that her mother is there and will talk honestly with her. As this mother and daughter can verify, parents who practice active listening often get more than just the story the author of a book has written down.

To be an active listener, follow some of these suggestions:

- **Avoid dead-end questions.** Ask questions that begin with "why" and "how?"
- **Repeat and extend your child's response.** Getting him to talk may be as simple as repeating the last few words of his answer, hinting that he may add more to it.
- **Share your own thoughts and reactions.** Kids take their cues from adults—teach your child to share by showing her how you do it.
- **Define and reflect feelings.** If he's having trouble talking about feelings, guess what he might be thinking—a soft approach may work better than merely asking "What's wrong?"
- **Observe cues.** Your child will probably give you hints when it is time to stop.

Bridges to Cross

Talking to your children about their feelings or about the characters in a book demands the same sensitivity that you would use in conversing with any friend: you try to express your opinions without creating a negative impression. Here are some guidelines for friendly book-sharing conversations:

Negative		**Positive**
You listen. I'll read.	VS	Let's take turns reading.
Listen carefully for details.	VS	Interrupt at any time.
Stop whining. Read that chapter to me.	VS	Let's read first and then talk about the parts we really like.
When did the boy escape?	VS	What do you think of the boy's escape?
Anyone who would act like that is mean and wicked. How can you like him?	VS	I think that character is really evil. What is it about him that you find interesting?

We want to be active listeners who feel free to express our opinions, to make our own decisions, and to agree or disagree. Our goal, of course, is to end each of these conversations with an enhanced feeling of closeness and respect for one another.

Choosing Books for Children, Ages 12 to14

It can be particularly challenging to establish and maintain connections with kids in this age group. Their growing sophistication and broadening activities often focus their attention outside the home. Use the chart on the next page to help you understand what interests are common to kids from twelve to fourteen and to see what books you might find interesting to read and discuss with your child.

Mythical Journeys

Developing a sense of personal identity is vitally important to middle-school-age kids. Books that help children "try on" different roles are of special interest to them as they make the difficult journey toward forming a sense of personal identity. They especially like stories based on the mythical journey or adventures of a heroic character. A new development of egocentrism typically leads kids at this stage to imagine themselves as the center of others' attention and to feel that their problems are unique. During the

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Children Ages 12 to 14

Developmental Characteristics	Reading Interests	Books
Developing a sense of identity is important; increased egocentrism leads to imagining self as center of others' attention and feeling that one's own problems are unique; intense interest in sexuality and the world of older teens.	Enjoys stories of mythical adventures with heroic characters; identifies with characters who are intense or self-absorbed.	Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack One Fat Summer The Cat Ate My Gymsuit Motown and Didi: A Love Story Stand and Deliver The Goats
Developing a capacity to reason and analyze situations and make value and ethical judgments.	Enjoys books that reflect concerns about relationships with family and friends.	Chernowitz! Dead Birds Singing Cracker Johnson Izzy, Willy-Nilly
Sensitive to feelings and relationships.	Enjoys more complex stories and needs discussion/sharing time to negotiate meanings in stories that pose moral dilemmas.	The Outsiders I Am the Cheese The Chocolate War

middle-school years, kids usually develop a new capacity for introspection; thus they tend to identify with characters who are intense or self-absorbed. Books that portray these kinds of characters include:

- ***Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack*** by M.E. Kerr. Tucker, the story's fifteen-year-old narrator, meets Dinky when he advertises for a home for his cat.

- ***One Fat Summer*** by Robert Lipsyte. This is a story about an overweight boy's quest for self-respect.

➲ ***The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*** by Paula Danzinger. A thirteen-year-old girl who is overweight and lonely joins a fight to help a teacher and finds friendship and a new sense of personal identity.

Adolescent Curiosity

Especially at this stage, books can provide your child with insight into experiences about which she is curious but which she might not yet be mature enough to handle in reality. Middle-schoolers are increasingly interested in sexuality, in the world of older teens, and often in those experiences that adults forbid or disapprove of. One middle-school teacher points out how adolescent literature can provide an education both for children and their parents in this regard:

> *I try to make parents comfortable with some of these [somewhat shocking] books by explaining that it is probably better for their child to experience things in literature rather than in real life. If they are curious about gangs, drugs, rebellion, or sex, it's in adolescent literature and it's far better to have them read about it in a book than have their child go through a similar situation in real life. I don't [recommend] any books that I feel are damaging, but we don't read* The Bobbsey Twins *either.*

Family book sharing can give you the chance to offer your middle-schooler the kind of parental guidance she'll need to balance the frank content of some adolescent literature with her own lack of experience in these matters. Books that reflect this stage of development include:

➲ ***Motown and Didi: A Love Story*** by Walter Dean Myers. Didi and Motown fall in love while trying to save Didi's brother from drug addiction.

- ***Stand and Deliver*** by Nicholas Edwards. A popular teacher inspires his apathetic, street-tough students to master college-level calculus and look to the future with hope and confidence.

- ***The Goats*** by Brock Cole. A boy and a girl are stripped of their clothes and left on an island in the night as a summer camp prank. Angry and humiliated, the two outcasts, or "goats," decide not to return to camp and instead begin an aimless journey.

Moral Dilemmas

As young teens and pre-teens mature and become more sensitive to complexity in human feelings and relationships, they seek richer and more complex stories. No longer seeing people and situations as either all good or all evil, they are able to react flexibly to questions about moral and ethical values. Discussions with parents can provide these young readers with necessary guidance as they try to understand stories that pose moral dilemmas and as they try to decide upon the values that they will choose to live by. Books that raise opportunities to discuss moral and ethical values include:

- ***Chernowitz!*** by Fran Arrick. Cherno tries to ignore the anti-Semitic remarks of the class bully. Action by his parents and the principal brings the prejudice into the open.

- ***Dead Birds Singing*** by Marc Talbert. Matt must deal with the death of his mother and sister, who were killed by a drunk driver.

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- ***Cracker Jackson*** by Betsy Byars. In this story, an eleven-year-old boy has nowhere to turn when his adult friend, Alma, gets caught up in a situation beyond her control.

- ***Izzy, Willy-Nilly*** by Cynthia Voigt. Tenth-grader-cheerleader-nice-girl Izzy has been in a serious automobile accident, and her leg must be amputated. Izzy faces the loss of her leg and the challenge of learning to walk with a prosthesis, but her real challenge lies in dealing with her changed social status.

Relationships

More than any other age group, pre-teens like books that they can discuss with and pass along to their friends. Family book sharing can be one way for parents to bridge the widening gap between the middle-schooler's social and family lives. Middle-school-age kids say that they like books that reflect their concerns about their relationships with family and friends. Books that explore these issues include:

- ***The Outsiders*** by S. E. Hinton. This outstanding first novel about the tensions between two rival gangs in a city in Oklahoma is told from the point of view of Ponyboy, a young greaser.

- ***I Am the Cheese*** by Robert Cormier. Adam starts a bicycle trip to find his hospitalized father. Through the course of Adam's journey, the reader learns some secrets about Adam and his family.

- ***The Chocolate War*** by Robert Cormier. This story about a high-school student's psychological showdown with his classmates is continued in a sequel called *Beyond the Chocolate War*.

The books listed here will provide you and your child with hours of enjoyable reading and many interesting ideas to talk about with one another. Don't forget to ask other members of your team—grandparents, teachers, librarians, older siblings, friends and neighbors—for their suggestions. Remember, the most important thing is to keep reading and talking about books with your child.

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Writing: Another Way of Sharing

With children of any age, parents can encourage reading and conversation using a variety of enjoyable activities. One of the most rewarding for kids in the 12- to 14-year-old group is using writing to share ideas. Here are some ideas that will make your reading partnership with your child more pleasurable for both of you while helping make school performance improve as a bonus.

> *We usually read on our own and then talk about the book. We have a dialogue journal and I always write to my mom in it. I'm always asking her, "How are you doing?" This has been fun to do.*
>
> — a seventh-grader

Many children and adults feel hesitant when someone asks them to talk about their feelings, yet the same people can write about deep emotions in open and frank terms. Even when a child knows that others will read his account, he lets his joys and fears spill out without the embarrassment that would inhibit him in a conversation about the same feelings.

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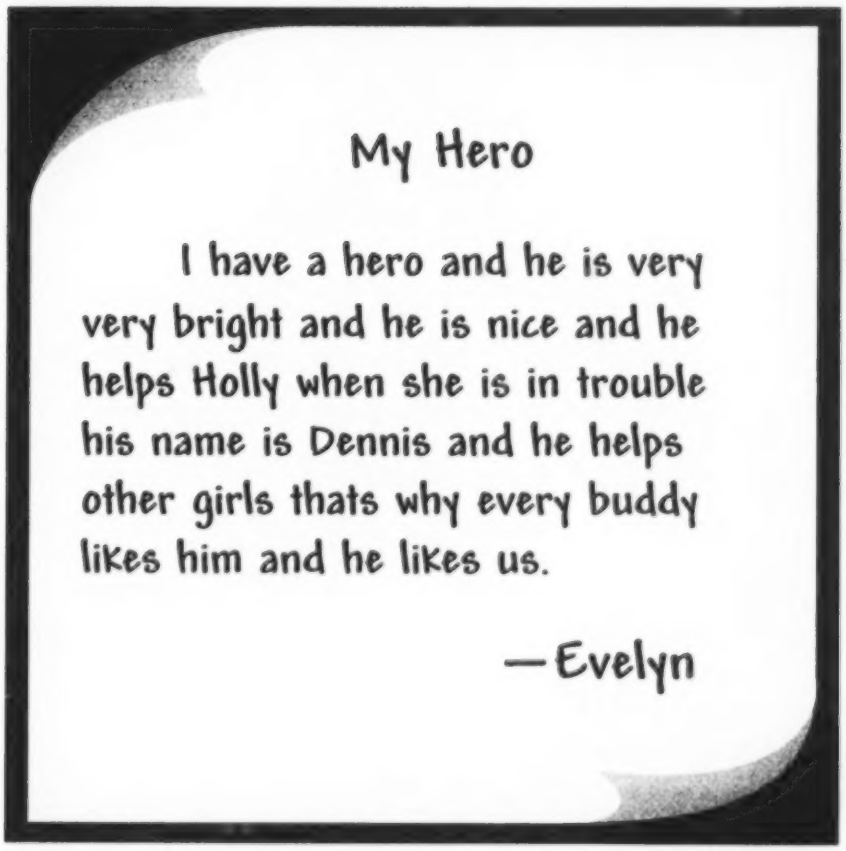
Evelyn's written statement let Ms. Futton know for the first time that her daughter observed and appreciated the helpfulness and kindness of a boy in her class. Books often bring feelings like these to the surface. Writing about these feelings provides a way for young readers to work through inner struggles.



My Hero

I have a hero and he is very very bright and he is nice and he helps Holly when she is in trouble his name is Dennis and he helps other girls thats why every buddy likes him and he likes us.

—Evelyn

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Aswan, a sixth-grader, wrote the following entry in her diary after she had read Judy Blume's novel *Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret:*

> What I'm writing about is how I'm not always sure of how to act, what to say, what to do, or how to think. Sometimes, saying the wrong thing (or something that others think to be the wrong thing) can bring up a lot of problems. For example, if I wrote about death in a way that you found unacceptable, you might think that I was homicidal or suicidal. (I'm not either of them. It was just an example.)
>
> With adults, (If you aren't an adult) a person is supposed to be polite, think before you speak, and use good manners. Some adults appreciate the curtesy but others think that you are acting snobbish or phony.
>
> With friends, or people that you would like to be friends with, what you say makes a difference, too. (especially if you are at a new school). Sometimes, when you are friends with people in two different groups, you have to act differently to be accepted.

Aswan's response to Judy Blume's novel opened the door for her and her father to have a conversation about her feelings of insecurity, and for her father to share his own experiences of being unsure of how to

act when he was a young adolescent. Books that we think of as good ones usually stir up our emotions, bring to mind old memories, or spark an interesting line of creative thinking for us. Enjoyable books are ones that arouse our hopes, our fears, and our enthusiasm for discovery. Sometimes it will be easier, or maybe simply more fun, for you and your child to share these kinds of reactions by writing about them, expressing them with artwork, or acting them out. As Aswan's journal entry shows, this indirect approach can be a good way to start a conversation about something that one or both of you finds difficult to bring up. It can also be a way for you and your child to add spice and variation to your book-sharing sessions.

Using writing to share books with your child will:

- help you tailor your book sharing to your child's particular talents and abilities.
- sharpen your child's critical-thinking skills.
- emphasize important connections between reading and writing.
- make book sharing more fun.
- help your child see reading as something that is meaningful to her.

When children express their reactions to books in writing they are more likely to see books and reading as an enjoyable and real part of their own lives. Here are some ways you can use writing to enrich your book sharing.

Keeping a Journal

When a story arouses feelings or memories from deep within us, writing can be a way of expressing and exploring those feelings. An incident or a character in a story might prompt a child (or an adult) to write about a time when she was feeling left out, hurt, sad, particularly happy, or especially proud of herself. Doing this in a personal journal or diary can be a way for kids to express and thus better understand these feelings. A journal may be entirely private, or each of you may share those passages that you think will keep your conversation moving. Some parents have found that by folding a page over, they can mark and thus keep private those pages they or their children do not want to share.

Expressive writing can be a great way for young people to find imaginative outlets for emotions that may be denied expression elsewhere. It is especially important that parents with children in middle school and high school—the turbulent years—use literature and creative writing to help their teens work through encounters with budding relationships, peer pressure, or anxiety about their future as adults.

Reading gives young people a good channel for dealing with intimacy and the other problems they must face. Writing can be an even better mode of exploration for kids of this age. Sometimes this writing takes on the nature of self-talk, as in the journal entry on the next page written by a fourteen-year-old:

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My mother says I'm too young to date. I can understand her reasons, since I'm only fourteen. I have a boyfriend. I think I'm in love. My mother doesn't like me to get seriously involved in a relationship this young. I thinks she's too late. She knew my father when she was my age. They married six years later, divorced 14 [years] after that. My sister is twenty now. She also dated a guy for six years and married him. She's 8 months pregnant.

I'm not saying I'm going to marry my boyfriend. If I do it won't be until after college. I'm not going to plan out my entire life right now. Who's to say how we'll turn out.

For right now, I love him. I guess we'll wait a few years until my mother lets me date. It sure is hard though. I see him at school and he comes over but it's not the same.

In my opinion, I should be able to have a boyfriend without everyone telling me I'm too young to get so serious. I'm not stupid and I'm not going to let anything happen. What is everyone so afraid of?

Encourage your young teen to keep a diary or to write letters, poems, and stories that help him examine his innermost feelings. As one educational expert has pointed out, "It is more important for adolescents to write something than it is for them to write something important."

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Any form of writing that is supported by constructive feedback from you and respect for your teen's individual privacy can be beneficial to him or her. You may even find that providing a nurturing environment in which your teenage child can vent deeply felt emotions in print will help to ease family tensions and will actually improve relations between you and your teenager.

TIP

Let your child's journal remain private if she prefers. This will encourage her to write about strong feelings and thereby come to understand them better.

Keeping a Dialogue Journal

In a dialogue journal, two or more people take turns talking to one another in writing. Writing in a dialogue journal is a way of sharing important feelings, ideas, and experiences with another person. One father who had started a dialogue journal with his son discovered how writing can provide a valuable outlet for powerful memories and emotions. This father read the book *The Land I Lost* with his son. The book, which is about a boy growing up in Vietnam, brought up memories of the father's tour of duty with the U.S. Army in Vietnam during the war. This man had never talked about those experiences before, either to his wife or to his children, but they became part of the written conversations he had with his son in their dialogue journal. Needless to say, their dialogue-journal exchange added more depth and a whole new dimension to this father's and son's relationship.

You can start such a journal in an old notebook or writing tablet that you leave in a special place where each of you can make frequent entries. Keeping a dialogue journal is just a way for two people to hold a conversation on paper. Any child who has begun to grasp the basic principles of reading and writing can use this technique. When a parent keeps a dialogue journal with a child who is just learning to read and write, that parent helps her child see how genuinely useful reading and writing actually can be. A parent who starts a dialogue journal with an older child has opened one more important channel of communication with that child.

When children use writing to gain information, imagine stories, express their feelings, or persuade others to accept their opinions, they are writing to achieve a purpose. Printing messages to their moms or dads helps kids learn how to use written language to express their own meanings—it allows them to play with writing and see how to use it to communicate messages that are important to them.

TIP

Let your child know that this is not a homework situation, but an opportunity to communicate with you by using writing. Since this is writing intended only as a conversation, a communication of ideas and feelings, it should not be viewed as a homework project that must be edited and corrected. Just go with the flow.

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In the following dialogue journal entries, Emily and her mother casually discuss a book about a collie that they have been reading.

Emily—
Are you still reading Beautiful Joe? What is happening in the story?
Mom

Mom,
im reading Beautiful Joe all Right its great im Reading about Mrs Wood's chikins.
Emily.

Emily—
Tell me about Mrs Wood's chickens. Is beautiful Joe chasing them or are they chasing him?
Mom

Mom i Haven't finnesht the chaeter yet so i don't No. Emily

Emily,
Have you finished the chapter about Mrs Wood chickens? What did they do?
Mom

Mom,
yes I finished my chappid. Im on MR. H ; MR. A.
I going to tell you about the chikens Now.
MRS. Wood. came early to feed them and they thought that they were Late.
Emily.

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As your child writes to you in your dialogue journal, encourage him to spell words as they sound—to invent spellings for words he wants to use but isn't sure how to spell. This will allow him to play with language and to "talk" more freely in the journal. Don't let your child's insistence that he is a "bad speller" keep you from sharing in a journal. If your dialogue partner is an especially creative speller, you can make sure each of you understands the other's written message by reading your entries out loud to one another.

Right now you are probably wondering how your child will ever learn to spell properly if you encourage her to invent spellings. She will learn to spell correctly over time as schoolwork and other, more public, writing demand it. You can give her some direction by quietly and patiently modeling the correct spelling for words she spells creatively. To do this, you merely need to rephrase or repeat your child's statements as you add something of your own to them.

Writing Activities

- **Have a conversation on paper.** You and your child can use your dialogue journal to keep in touch about your reading when you don't have time to sit down and read or talk together about books. But your dialogue journal doesn't have to be just for written conversations about books. The two of you can also write messages to one another about other things you want to share.

If you leave the journal in a place where both of you have easy access to it, you and your child can make comments to each other whenever an idea

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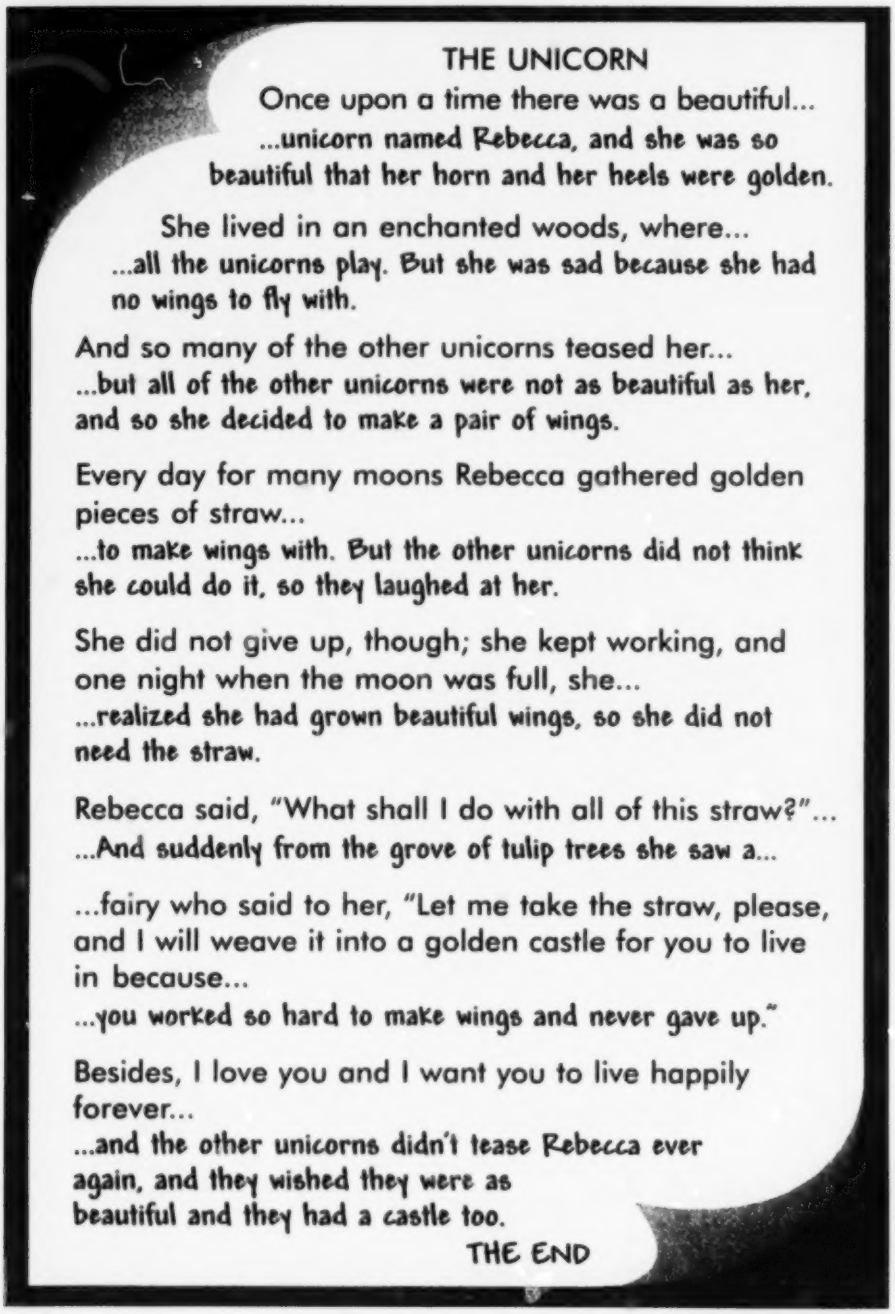
strikes you. For instance, if your child gets home from school while you are still at work, you might greet him with a few comments you've left in your journal. Isn't that a powerful way for you to let him know how much you care about him and to remind him that you're always thinking about him? You will be surprised how just writing notes to one another in an old notebook can add another rich dimension to your book sharing and to your overall relationship. Give it a try and see what interesting conversations the two of you can get going in your journal.

In order to start a conversation on paper, you will need to make the first entry; otherwise your child will probably respond to your invitation with a statement like, "I don't know what to write about." You can begin the conversation by writing a comment about a character or situation in a book the two of you are sharing. Close your entry by writing, "What do you think of this?" or "What were your reactions to this situation in the book?" You can encourage your child to elaborate on his previous entries by making comments like these: "I'm a little confused. Explain to me why Anderson has two homes." or "I'm really curious about Patch. Tell me more about him." or "Don't you think Gillie is a funny name for a girl? How did she get that name?"

You can also use your dialogue journal to do one of these activities:

- **Rewrite a story's ending.** After you and your child have finished reading a story, you might begin a dialogue journal entry with a "What if?" statement. Then go on to ask your child to imagine and write his own ending for the book. Encourage him to include as many details as seem appropriate to his age and interest in the story.

- **Two heads are better than one.** Use your dialogue journal to write a story with your child. Here's how: one of you writes a sentence or two of the story and then the other one takes a turn with it.



THE UNICORN

Once upon a time there was a beautiful...

...unicorn named Rebecca, and she was so beautiful that her horn and her heels were golden.

She lived in an enchanted woods, where...

...all the unicorns play. But she was sad because she had no wings to fly with.

And so many of the other unicorns teased her...

...but all of the other unicorns were not as beautiful as her, and so she decided to make a pair of wings.

Every day for many moons Rebecca gathered golden pieces of straw...

...to make wings with. But the other unicorns did not think she could do it, so they laughed at her.

She did not give up, though; she kept working, and one night when the moon was full, she...

...realized she had grown beautiful wings, so she did not need the straw.

Rebecca said, "What shall I do with all of this straw?"...

...And suddenly from the grove of tulip trees she saw a...

...fairy who said to her, "Let me take the straw, please, and I will weave it into a golden castle for you to live in because...

...you worked so hard to make wings and never gave up."

Besides, I love you and I want you to live happily forever...

...and the other unicorns didn't tease Rebecca ever again, and they wished they were as beautiful and they had a castle too.

THE END

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- **Write your own sequel.** Have you ever had the experience of enjoying a book so much you hated to see it end? One solution to that problem is to write your own sequel. One mother's twelve-year-old son Bobby thinks this is a terrific way to keep a good story alive. He loves creating new problems for his favorite characters to solve. When Bobby had read his way through all of the *Encyclopedia Brown* series, he decided to write his own *Encyclopedia Brown* mystery. Bobby thinks writing sequels is so much fun that he's begun to write another one. This one is a follow-up to *Alice in Wonderland*.

Wonderland Magic

It was a lazy day at Alice's house. She was playing with her cat Dinah. What she needed was a friend. She was bored with playing with a cat, she wanted a human friend.

"Oh Dinah," said Alice, "I don't want to be rude, but you're boring. I can't have a good conversation with you."

Dinah meowed.

"See, it's hopeless," sighed Alice.

Alice got up from her chair and walked to the window. She pulled back the drapes and saw some children playing hide-and-seek. She thought to herself, "I'll go outside and play with them." She opened the door. Dinah got up from the chair and followed Alice.

Alice and Dinah walked out the door. Suddenly a huge dog chased Alice and Dinah through Alice's house. The dog trampled over Alice to get to Dinah. Alice fell to the floor. Dinah jumped up on the mantelpiece and went through the magical looking glass. The dog, a little confused and a little scared, ran away. Alice got up and said, "Oh Dinah, wait for me!" She climbed up on the mantelpiece and went through the looking glass. Alice found herself in a dark forest with brightly colored trees. Then she heard some voices...

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Books for Young Writers

Books can serve as great writing models for children, especially when those books portray characters who use writing in fun and meaningful ways. Here are some books which do just that:

- ***My Side of the Mountain*** by Jean George (diary; for kids ages ten to fourteen). A modern-day Robinson Crusoe, city-bred Sam Gribley describes his year surviving as a runaway in a remote area of the Catskill Mountains. His journal account of living off the land includes moving stories about the animals, insects, plants, people, and books that helped him survive.

- ***Hey World, Here I Am!*** by Jean Little (poems and journal entries from Kate; for kids ages ten to fourteen). Kate uses her journal to talk about the difficulties of friendship and to continue her search for her own identity. In this book, the third in a series, Kate expresses her thoughts and feelings in poetry and prose.

- ***A Gathering of Days: A New England Girl's Journal*** by Joan Blos (historical fiction in journal entries; for kids ages eleven and up). A fugitive slave whom Catherine never meets brings changes to her life.

- ***The Burning Questions of Bingo Brown*** by Betsy Byars (journal entries full of interesting questions; for kids ages eleven to fourteen). Bingo uses his journal to agonize over such profound questions as how much mousse his hair needs, which of three girls he should pay attention to in his sixth-grade class, and how he can get one of these girls to hold hands with him.

- ***Dear Mr. Henshaw*** by Beverly Cleary (story told in letters and journal entries; for kids ages eleven to fourteen). Using only the letters and diary of a young boy named Leigh Botts, Cleary traces his personal growth from first to sixth grade. This diary allows the reader to watch the changes in Leigh's relationship with his divorced parents, see him in a succession of new schools where he always ends up the friendless new kid, and participate in the relationship that develops between Leigh and an author with whom he corresponds over the years. Most important, the book traces Leigh's changing relationship with himself.

- ***A Girl From Yamhill: A Memoir*** by Beverly Cleary (memoir from the author; for kids ages eleven and up). Beverly Cleary's memoir speaks to adults who have read her books, as well as to older kids. Glimpses of her popular book characters can be seen in the word portraits Cleary draws in this memoir of people from her own childhood. Among other things, the book reveals the difficult relationship Cleary had with her own mother. This can be a fruitful topic of conversation for parents and teenage kids.

- ***Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*** (historical World War II diary; for kids ages eleven and up). Anne's diary reveals the thoughts of an adolescent growing up under extraordinary conditions. It tells the true story of how Anne and her family hid from the Nazis for two years in the secret annex of an office building in Amsterdam.

- ***Germy Blew the Bugle*** by Rebecca Jones (articles in a school newspaper; for kids ages ten to fourteen). Jeremy Bluett, who is called "Germy

Blew It" by his sixth-grade friends, launches a school newspaper despite unwilling reporters, a principal who refuses to let him sell advertising, and deadline troubles.

- ***The China Year*** by Emily Neville (letters; for kids ages eleven to fourteen). Fourteen-year-old Henrietta Rich (Henri) spends a year in Beijing while her father is working as a foreign expert at the university. Henri's letters give readers a firsthand view of what it's like to live in a modern Chinese city. The story takes place just before the Chinese army drove into Tiananmen Square.

- ***Z for Zachariah*** by Robert O'Brien (novel in diary form; for kids ages eleven and up). This science-fiction novel begins during a nuclear war. As Ann hears radio stations go off the air one by one, she believes that she is the last living person on earth. Then she begins to carve out a life alone, accompanied only by the family dog. Ann keeps a diary of what she does to survive and of her growing resolve to find other survivors.

- ***Libby on Wednesday*** by Zilpha Keatley (creative journal entries; for kids ages eleven and up). Libby is an eleven-year-old who has been home schooled by well-educated adults. When she goes to public school, she is placed in the eighth grade where she wins a writing competition and then becomes part of a five-person writers' group. Libby feels uncomfortable in the group and so retreats to her treehouse where she records insights about her group members' personalities in her journal. Although Libby's journal is a personal one, she ends up sharing it with the others in her group in hopes that it will help them understand one another better.

- ***Strider*** by Beverly Cleary (journal entries; for kids ages eleven and up). This book is the sequel to *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. The story begins four years later when Leigh is a high school student and a track runner who still writes in his diary. Leigh befriends an abandoned dog on the beach and it is the dog that helps Leigh get through his father's abandonment and the conflicts created by a love triangle between himself, his only friend, and a girl on the track team.

- ***An Owl in the House: A Naturalist's Diary*** by Bernd Heinrich and adapted by Alice Calaprice (for kids ages eleven and up). This account studies the life cycle of an owl.

Use writing to keep your book-sharing partnership interesting and to help expand the horizons for communication between you and your child.

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Books on Sensitive Issues: Children, Ages 12—14

- ***Speak*** by Laurie Halse Anderson. A traumatic event near the end of the summer has a devastating effect on Melinda's freshman year in high school. (**Peer Pressure**)

- ***Go Ask Alice*** by Anonymous. Based on the diary of a fifteen-year-old drug user chronicling her struggle to escape the pull of the drug world. (**Drug Abuse**)

- ***The Hanged Man*** by Francesca Lia Block. Having stopped eating after the death of her father, seventeen-year-old Laurel feels herself losing control of her life in the hot, magical world of Los Angeles. (**Eating Disorder, Sexual Abuse**)

- ***Forever*** by Judy Blume. Two high school seniors believe their love to be so strong that it will last forever. (**Dating, Sexual Awareness**)

- ***We All Fall Down*** by Robert Cormier. As The Avenger searches for the teenage boys who trashed a house in his neighborhood, Buddy, one of the trashers, increases his drinking in order to cope with his parents' separation and his obsession with the daughter of the owner of the vandalized house. (**Alcoholism**)

- ***Ironman: A Novel*** by Chris Crutcher. While training for a triathlon, seventeen-year-old Bo attends an anger management group at school; that leads him to examine his relationship with his father. (**Coming of Age—Male**)

- ***Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*** by Chris Crutcher. The daily class discussions about the nature of man, the existence of God, organized religion, suicide, and other contemporary issues serve as a backdrop for a high school senior's attempt to answer a friend's dramatic cry for help. (**Conduct of Life**)

- ***Dear Nobody*** by Berlie Doherty. Eighteen-year-old Chris struggles to deal with two shocks that have changed his life: meeting his mother, who left him and his father when he was ten; and, his discovery that he has gotten his girlfriend pregnant. (**Teen Pregnancy**)

- ***The Voices of AIDS*** by Michael Thomas Ford. This book presents twelve personal interviews with young adults who are HIV-positive, friends and relatives of AIDS patients and AIDS educators and activists. (**AIDS**)

- ***The Eagle Kite*** by Paula Fox. Liam's father has AIDS, and his family cannot talk about it until Liam reveals a secret that he has tried to deny his

father's homosexuality ever since he saw his dad embracing another man at the beach. (**Homosexuality, AIDS**)

- ***Shizuko's Daughter*** by Kyoko Mori. After her mother's suicide when she is twelve years old, Yuki spends years living with her distant father and his resentful new wife, cut off from her mother's family, and relying on her own inner strength to cope with the tragedy. (**Suicide, Step-Family**)

- ***Monster*** by Walter Dean Myers. While on trial as an accomplice to a murder, sixteen-year-old Steve Harmon records his experiences in prison and in the courtroom in the form of a film script as he tries to come to terms with the course his life has taken. (**Law Breaking**)

- ***Dicey's Song*** by Cynthia Voigt. Now that the four abandoned Tillerman children are settled in with their grandmother, Dicey finds that their new beginnings require love, trust, humor, and courage. (**Coming of Age—Female, Poverty**)

- ***The House You Pass on the Way*** by Jacqueline Woodson. When fourteen-year-old Staggerlee, the daughter of a racially mixed marriage, spends a summer with her cousin Trout, she begins to question her own sexuality and catches a glimpse of her possible future self. (**Homosexuality**)

Conclusion

As you help children develop their reading skills, keep these guidelines in mind.

- Alternate roles as reader and listener; take turns reading pages or chapters to each other.
- Get two copies of a book so that you can read independently. Then mark your favorite passages and talk about them when you are together.
- Encourage your child to discuss what she is reading with adults. This can provide important guidance and insight during the difficult early teen years.

Also remember that *active* reading is the goal. This means you should do the following things when you talk about books with your child.

- Ask "why" or "how" to avoid dead-end questions.
- Repeat and extend your child's observations.

- Give your own thoughts and reactions freely.
- Help your child find the words to express difficult ideas and complex feelings.

Choosing Books for Young Teens

Remember that adolescents like to read stories about exotic journeys and the exploits of daring heroes and heroines. Stories can also feed your child's curiosity about experiences that may lie ahead. It's far better for your child to read about issues such as gangs or drugs than to encounter them in real life without any preparation.

Young teens are also becoming aware of the complexity of human feelings and the dilemmas posed by questions of right and wrong. Again, reading about these questions can help prepare your child to deal with them in real life. Also, children in middle school are becoming aware of the gap between their life inside the home and in the outside world. For this reason, they like to read about relationships among family members and friends.

Writing as a Way of Sharing

In addition to talking about what they are reading, young teens like to write about their responses to books and stories. They are more likely to let their true feelings spill out onto the page than they are to talk about them openly.

Keeping a journal or diary provides a good way for teens to express their feelings. It also gives them a chance to indulge their imaginations and to write what they think about a book or story they have read.

You can also share a dialogue journal in which you take turns talking to each other in writing. This can add new meaning and depth to your relationship with your child.

Here are a few things you can do to encourage your child to write.

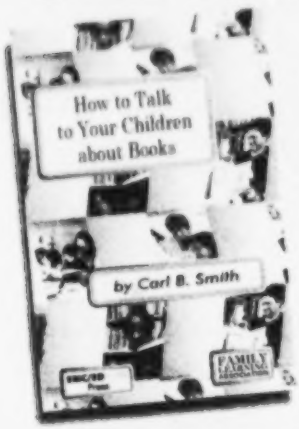
- Have a conversation on paper. Use a dialogue journal not only to write about the books you are reading but also to carry on a conversation and exchange messages.

- Rewrite the ending of a story you have read. Just ask "What if?" and go on to dream up your own version of the final pages.

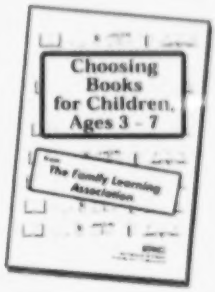
- Start with a sentence or two of a story in your dialogue journal and then take turns adding more sentences.

- Pick a book or story you both like and write a sequel. Especially if it's a mystery or adventure story, you can both think of new problems for the characters to solve.

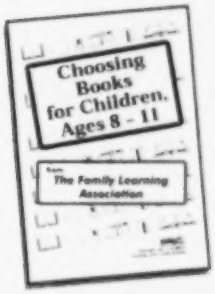
If you found this book useful, please try the other books in the Series!



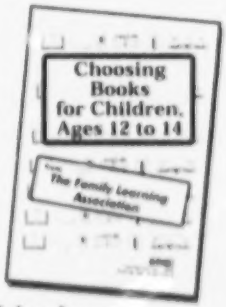
How to Talk to Your Children about Books *by Carl B. Smith*
Start a conversation that will last a lifetime. This book teaches you five easy techniques to prompt book discussions, guidelines for selecting books, how to make it a two-way exchange, plus motivation, values, and making it fun!



Choosing Books for Children, Ages 3 to 7
Use this resource to appeal to a variety of interests in your kindergarten- to primary-age children. Filled with great tips for keeping book conversations going, this book pinpoints a vast array of age-appropriate reading materials.



Choosing Books for Children, Ages 8 to 11
Quick summaries of a huge collection of titles will make it easy to provide good reading for your pre-teens. Top-notch authors, relevant themes, and sensitive issues make this a good companion at the library or bookstore.



Choosing Books for Children, Ages 12 to 14
Let literature open up discussion about some of the difficult issues your teen is experiencing. Includes a special section on communicating about books though writing and journaling.

For information about these and other helpful books:
The Family Learning Association
3925 Hagan Street, Suite 101, Bloomington, Indiana 47401
1.800.759.4723 www.kidscanlearn.com

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